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Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: a pragmatist turn?

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the rise of resilience discourses in EU foreign policy. The European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) refers to building state and societal resilience in its neighbourhood as one of the key strategic priorities of the EU. This article argues that the discourse of resilience that permeates the EUGS chimes well with a pragmatist turn in social sciences and global governance. The EUGS introduces resilience-building alongside an emphasis on flexibility, tailor-made approaches and the need for local ownership, capacity-building and comprehensiveness. More importantly, the new EUGS proposes “principled pragmatism” as a new operating principle in its foreign policy. While this might suggest a more pragmatic EU foreign policy, a closer examination of the EUGS discourse reveals significant tensions between a pragmatic and a principled foreign policy, which undermine the added value of resilience-building as a new foreign policy paradigm.

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Introduction

The concept of resilience has gradually colonised the foreign policy discourse and practice of most Western states and international organisations as evidenced by the US National Security Strategy (White House 2015) and UN reports on climate change, disaster-preparedness and development policy (UN 2012, 2013), to mention but a few. More recently, the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) refers to building state and societal resilience in its neighbourhood as one of the key strategic priorities of the EU. It would be just easy to dismiss resilience as mere rhetoric or another “buzzword” in the EU’s jargon to join the likes of “effective multilateralism” and the “comprehensive approach”. But as with these other concepts, their reiteration in EU circles might have the effect of mobilising action in particular directions, not least shaping the EU’s international identity. Since this discourse has particular political effects, it is important to scrutinise what the addition of this new policy priority might entail for the EU’s foreign policy. In other words, what does the EU mean by resilience-building? And what are the implications of the rise of resilience in the EU’s foreign policy discourse?

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Drawing on the resilience literature, this article argues that the discourse of resilience that permeates the EUGS chimes well with a pragmatist turn in social sciences and global governance which focuses on the practical consequences of actions and local practices. In this vein, the EUGS introduces resilience-building alongside an emphasis on flexibility, tailor-made approaches and the need for local ownership, capacity-building and comprehensiveness. More importantly, the new EUGS proposes “principled pragmatism” as a new operating principle in its foreign policy. This pragmatist turn could serve as a new catalyst for EU foreign policy and provide an opportunity to move beyond the “liberal peace” towards a more bottom-up approach to building peace. However, by proposing *principled* pragmatism in the form of resilience-building as a new foreign policy paradigm, the EU has tried to square the circle, raising in turn more theoretical and practical problems than it solves. Theoretically, principled pragmatism implies that the EU should act in accordance with universal values (liberal ones in this case), but then follow a pragmatic approach which denies the moral imperatives of those universal categories. The EU needs to be either pragmatic or principled; it cannot have it both ways. In practical terms, while claiming that it will continue to promote democracy and human rights, it is argued that the EU should do so on a case-by-case basis. This is bound to generate more criticisms of self-interest, selectivity and double standards and accentuate the weaknesses and limitations of the EU as an international actor, eroding its identity as a normative power. In sum, the EU has adopted the new concept of resilience and a more pragmatic attitude in the EUGS, but it remains tied to the old liberal scripts, failing to resolve existing tensions in its foreign policy.

The article proceeds as follows. It firstly situates the resilience discourse within existing and previous developments in EU foreign policy. Drawing on the resilience literature, the article then explains what the implications of the emergence of this discourse are for global governance and how this has been theorised in international relations. This contribution argues that resilience can be located within a pragmatic turn in social sciences, which has moved from the search for objective and universal laws to examining the practical consequences of acts. Secondly, this pragmatist turn also fits with a renewed focus on local practices and micro-processes. The third part of the article examines whether the resilience discourse contained in the EUGS can be understood as a pragmatic turn in EU foreign policy and what the implications and challenges of this might be for the EU’s role and identity as an international actor.

The rise of resilience in EU foreign policy

On 28 June 2016, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, officially presented the “EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy” (hereafter EUGS) to the European Council. While the attention of the Heads of State and Government was absorbed by the outcome of the British referendum and many suggested that the presentation of the EUGS should be postponed or even ditched altogether, the HR/VP’s view was that it was precisely at this moment in time that a Global Strategy for the Union was needed (see also Tocci 2016).

There is no need to rehearse here the whole process of how the EUGS came to light (see for instance, Missiroli 2015), suffice to mention that the preparatory work for the EUGS was

launched after the European Council Conclusions in December 2013 in the form of a strategic assessment presented to the Council in June 2015 (EEAS 2015). On the basis of this assessment, the Council tasked the HR/VP with the drafting of the document. This final process included wide consultations with EU member states, EU institutions, third-country representatives, civil society, experts and academics. While the content of the EUGS owes a lot to Nathalie Tocci, Special Adviser to EU HRVP Federica Mogherini, and the European External Action Service (EEAS) Strategic Planning Division, the extensive process of discussion described earlier suggests that the EUGS represents a degree of consensus within EU foreign policy circles. Because of this, it is even more remarkable that the term resilience has such an important place in this strategy. Resilience, defined in the EUGS as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (EUGS 2016, p. 23), is mentioned no less than 41 times in the 60-page document. More specifically, building “state and societal resilience to our East and South” is identified as one of the five key priorities for the EU’s external action (alongside building the Union’s own security; pursuing an integrated approach to conflicts and crises; supporting cooperative regional orders and a commitment to a reformed multi-lateral, rules-based system of global governance). Moreover, references to resilience and to resilient societies, states and democracies span beyond this specific section to other parts of the document to include the resilience of critical infrastructure, networks and services and the resilience of the EU’s democracies.

This is certainly not the first time resilience has been mentioned in an EU document. Resilience was first embraced by the development community in Brussels, following similar trends in the UN system, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) and other EU member states (see, for instance, Cabinet Office 2011). In development, humanitarian and disaster and risk reduction management policies, resilience is defined as “the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, cope, adapt, and quickly recover from stresses and shocks such as violence, conflict, drought and other natural disasters without compromising long-term development” (European Commission 2016, p. 1). This understanding of resilience was endorsed by the Council in its Council Conclusions on an EU Approach to Resilience (Council of the EU 2013), followed up by the Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries for 2013–2020 (European Commission 2013). These documents have further recognised the need to prioritise a number of elements in the EU’s policy cycle: risk assessment, risk reduction, prevention, mitigation and preparedness, and swift response to and recovery from crises. The EU Resilience Compendium (European Commission 2014) illustrates with concrete examples how the resilience approach is being translated into reality. The most notable examples of EU resilience initiatives include AGIR (The Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative) in the Sahel and SHARE (Supporting the Horn of Africa’s Resilience).

From development and humanitarian policies, resilience has slowly but surely made its way to the foreign and security policy arena. The vagueness and malleability of the term mean that it has been embraced by a wide range of actors and in a multitude of contexts (Wagner and Anholt 2016). In the area of foreign policy, resilience has thus been preferred over more “tainted” and politically riskier concepts such as democratisation. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) strategy adopted at the end of 2015 is one of the first documents to introduce resilience-building as a foreign policy goal. According to the document, “[t]he measures set out in this Joint Communication seek to offer

ways to strengthen the resilience of the EU's partners in the face of external pressures and their ability to make their own sovereign choices" (European Commission and HR/VP 2015b, p. 4). However, it also adds that "the new ENP will take stabilisation as its main political priority" (Commission and HR/VP 2015b, p. 2). While this is slightly different from the way the EUGS understands resilience (as "the ability to reform"), both of them seem to rely on resilience to operate a move towards a more pragmatic foreign policy. If this is the case, what would this move entail? Before examining in more detail the EUGS, it is worth having a look first at the wider literature on resilience for some clues.

Resilience, governance and pragmatism

While the concept of resilience was once the preserve of systems ecology and biology, it has now entered the social sciences vocabulary. From its original meaning "to jump back" (in Latin, *resilio*), the meaning of resilience has metamorphosed between and within disciplines so that we can argue that there is no agreement on what resilience actually means (Brasset *et al.* 2013). First uses of the concept of resilience in systems ecology tended to emphasise the ability of systems to return to an equilibrium *ex ante* (this is also in line with understandings of resilience in engineering). By contrast, in his study of large ecological systems, Holling refers to resilience as "a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables and parameters, and still persist" (Holling 1973, p. 17), which suggests a much more dynamic understanding of resilience. From ecology, the notion of resilience then travelled to psychology (Seligman 2011), political economy (Cooper and Walker 2011) disaster and crisis response (Boin *et al.* 2010), development and humanitarian aid (Duffield 2012) and peace-building (Chandler 2012, 2013). Brasset *et al.* (2013, p. 222) argue that "like it or not, resilience is fast becoming the organising principle in contemporary political life".

In politics and international relations, resilience has increasingly been conceived as a new form of governance, in particular, as an "anticipatory form of governance" (Cooper and Walker 2011) and governance "from a distance" (Joseph 2014). As such, resilience represents a shift from a logic focused on known threats and prevention (predominant during the Cold and post-Cold War period) to a new governmental logic (or rationality), which emphasises complexity and uncertainty and thus the impossibility of predicting threats. As a consequence, resilience requires us to be prepared for unknown risks; adaptation, learning by doing and flexibility as a way to respond to shocks, to embrace change and to *live with* rather than completely eliminate uncertainty (Duffield 2012, Reid 2012, Evans and Reid 2014).

When applied to societies and organisations, resilience acknowledges uncertainty and complexity as a contemporary condition, but emphasises internal capacities and capabilities as the way to deal with these problems, rather than external intervention. Understood in this way, resilience can be defined as "the internal capacity of societies to cope with crises, with the emphasis on the development of self-organisation and internal capacities and capabilities rather than the external provision of aid, resources or policy solutions" (Chandler 2015b, p. 13). Thus, the new resilience paradigm imposes a degree of restraint on Western international actors by acknowledging that external imposition through coercion and/or conditionality as a way to spread universal (liberal) recipes cannot solve complex emergent problems. Instead adaptive and novel

solutions are required, as well as a much more pragmatic approach to international intervention.

The emergence of resilience can thus be located in a context where pragmatism has been on the rise, both in practice and in theory. In policy practice, the setbacks that Western powers have suffered since the early 2000s have led to a resurgence of pragmatic policy-making (Goetschel 2011). As put by Joseph, resilience “turns from the grand projects of social engineering and universal rights to take a much more pragmatist view of social life” (Joseph 2016, p. 379). For instance, President Barack Obama has been labelled a “pragmatist” several times. But even a constructivist scholar such as John Ruggie, who has served as the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Business and Human Rights since 2015, has called for “a new pragmatic approach” to promoting human rights principles to ensure business support for human rights globally (Snyder and Vinjamuri 2012, p. 435). For their part, Haldrup and Rosén have noted how United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiatives have moved from a focus on large-scale institution-building to a more pragmatic approach, “making whatever structures do exist resilient through propping up the individual capacities of the people running them”, that is, working with what is already there through a “coaching and mentoring approach” (Haldrup and Rosén 2013, p. 140). This has been accompanied by a change in vocabulary from capacity-building to “capacity development”. Resilience can thus be linked with this move towards more pragmatic policy-making, but it can also be located within a pragmatic turn in the social sciences. The latter entails two developments: (1) a rediscovery of pragmatist philosophy, with its rejection of objective and universal laws, and its emphasis on the practical consequences of acts; and (2) a renewed focus on local practices and micro-processes heralded by pragmatic sociology.

Firstly, contemporary resilience thinking can be linked to some of the ideas of early twentieth-century philosophical pragmatism. Pragmatist philosophers like William James or John Dewey shared a concern with epistemological uncertainty and complexity, which challenged Cartesian notions of objective truth, and argued that in order to ascertain truth, we should turn to “practical consequences”. Pragmatist fallibilism also means all theories and beliefs should be treated as working hypotheses which may need to be revised in light of future experience. From this perspective, the aim is not to arrive at absolute certainty so that we can reach the truth, but to be sure that we have the correct method of enquiry so that we can identify errors. Enquiry is also seen as a community activity or as shared enquiry. More recently, a number of thinkers, such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam or Robert Brandom, among others, have also identified themselves with pragmatism or developed some of the ideas of the pragmatist tradition (see for instance, Rorty 1982, Putnam 1994, Brandom 2011). Drawing on philosophical pragmatism, Schmidt (2015, p. 416) argues that resilience “points us to a more appropriate, realistic and much more promising source of empowerment: we need to shift our focus from causal forces to consequences”. In line with pragmatist theory, she argues that

human agency in resilience discourses is no longer primarily thought of in terms of seeking to shape the external environment through conscious, autonomous and goal-oriented decision-making. Instead, agency resurfaces in terms of making (constant) change on inner life through learning from exposure to the contingencies of ontological complexity. (Schmidt 2015, p. 404)

This understanding of resilience directs attention not only to the limitations, but also to the opportunities and new possibilities for transformation that present to agency in conditions of uncertainty and complexity. In particular, resilience puts an emphasis on learning and robustness as central processes. This is in line with Deweyan understandings of governance, which see governance as “a continuous process of self-transformation through experiencing and learning from life” (Schmidt 2015, p. 416). Moreover, learning seems particularly relevant in times of crisis: rather than being seen as fatalistic, crises can lead to innovation through learning and, as a consequence, resilience can help unblock deadlocks and help us reach our full potential (Schmidt 2015, p. 408). For its part, robustness refers to reiterative cycles of experiencing, experimenting and learning, in a world in which new information is constantly produced, but does not lead to greater knowledge (Hallegatte *et al.* cited in Schmidt 2015, p. 418). An EU foreign policy inspired by pragmatism should thus be open to learning from the consequences of everyday acts, embracing complexity and uncertainty as an opportunity rather than as a threat.

Secondly, resilience discourses can also be located within current discussions about the importance of the “everyday” in politics and international relations, which have been informed to a large degree by French pragmatic sociology. As put by Joseph (2016, p. 379): “[t]he paradox of contemporary understandings of the world is that the more uncertain we are of the bigger (global) picture, the more we must rely on the small detail of the little picture”. Since we cannot grasp complexity at the macro-level, we should turn our attention to the micro-level in order to better adapt to changes. According to Chandler (2015a), resilience approaches inspired by pragmatic sociologists like Michel de Certeau, Luc Boltanski and Bruno Latour can help by bringing to light the transformative power of local practices and understandings, trying to understand “actors en situation”. Pragmatic sociology focuses on how everyday practices work in a particular context. As Chandler (2015a, p. 29) argues, this approach “starts neither from universalist nor cultural relativist assumptions with regard to formal institutional frameworks but with the effects of their application in particular circumstances”. Seen from this perspective, external intervention should only facilitate these practices “from below”, rather than seeking to impose a universal blueprint as was the case with the liberal peace approach. What this means for EU foreign policy is that resilience provides an opportunity to move beyond the liberal peace to a more bottom-up approach to building peace.

While this pragmatist turn in policy practice and theory should be welcome, there are still some problems with the way resilience operates from a pragmatist perspective. For instance, while resilience highlights local agency and the need for responsabilisation, there is also a tendency to depoliticise issues and, with this, the risk of acting as “empire in denial” (Chandler 2006). Thus, Joseph (2016, p. 370) describes resilience as “a new governance through denial that further shifts responsibility onto the governed”. According to Brassett *et al.* (2013, p. 221), “resilience seems to carry a productive ambiguity that both resists exact definition and allows for a spectrum of interactions and engagements between policy and the everyday which are as (seemingly) effective as they are (apparently) apolitical”. While this ambiguity explains its success in EU policy circles (Wagner and Anholt 2016), the depoliticisation of resilience could obscure issues of accountability and power relations (Chandler 2015a).

The question of power needs to be central in any examination of resilience. For instance, Duffield (2012), Chandler (2013) and others have argued that Western powers

and international organisations build the resilience of the underdeveloped as a way to increase the security of the developed world. It can also be seen as part of a neo-liberal agenda of rolling back the state (by increasing self-sufficiency) and removing barriers to free markets. Resilience then allows the West to maintain a policy of intervention, but this time avoiding charges of neo-colonialism by shifting responsibility to the governance targets, giving them “responsibility without power” (Joseph 2013). In this light, resilience could be seen as a continuation of neo-liberal forms of government. With its emphasis on adaptation, partnership, self-reliance and the responsabilisation of individuals (as opposed to the state), resilience reinforces neo-liberal economics. In fact, it is this fit with neo-liberal forms of power that explains the spread of resilience. As explained by Walker and Cooper (2011, p. 153),

across disciplines and policy arenas loosely concerned with the logistics of crisis management [...] the success of this ecological concept in colonizing multiple arenas of governance is due to its intuitive ideological fit with a neoliberal philosophy of complex adaptive systems.

From this perspective, resilience is “a form of neoliberal governmentality producing neoliberal subjects” (Joseph 2016, p. 371). The following section examines whether the introduction of resilience in the EUGS operates a move towards a more pragmatic foreign policy and/or whether this can be seen as a continuation of a neo-liberal form of governance.

Resilience and the pragmatic turn in the EUGS

Given the discussion above, does the inclusion of resilience in the EUGS denote a pragmatic turn in European foreign policy? If so, what are the implications of this turn? Looking at the operation of resilience in the EUGS, it would seem that the starting premise is crisis, complexity and a sense of uncertainty, so this chimes well with global discourses of resilience. The optimism contained in the opening statement of the *European Security Strategy* adopted in 2003 – “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free” (European Council 2003, p. 1) – could not be in more contrast to that of the new *EU Global Strategy*. The new security strategy states: “We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned” (EUGS 2016, p. 7). The EEAS strategic assessment of 2015 speaks of a “more connected, contested and complex world” (EEAS 2015). The EU’s approach on resilience clearly connects increasing complexity with the rise of resilience:

Today’s world is characterised by increasingly complex challenges and trends: climate change, protracted displacement, pandemics, extremism, population movements and growth. Such challenges test the resilience of communities and national institutions and stretch the ability of regional and international organisations to support them. (Council of the EU 2013, p. 1)

According to Joseph, the failure to deal with complexity and uncertainty, as well as the record of previous failures, is what has led to the rise of resilience, which is why he labels resilience as “governance through failure” (Joseph 2016). Indeed, despite the institutional reforms brought forward by the Lisbon Treaty (2009), which included the establishment of the post of EU HR (Mogherini’s role) and the EEAS, there seems to be

agreement among observers and policy-makers that the Union faces increasing political, economic and existential challenges. Among them, the EU faces an internal crisis, which is testing the European project, a crisis which stems from the Eurozone economic crisis and the rise of populism and Euroscepticism, now worsened by the crisis resulting from the vote of the UK to leave the EU. External crises include a deteriorating geopolitical environment in the Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods, the rise of Islamic terrorism and the threat represented by ISIS, hybrid threats and the refugee crisis. To this, one can add a broader crisis affecting the international liberal order, which has questioned the “liberal peace” and Western interventionism (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, Mazarr 2014), and in so doing the EU’s own global liberal project.

In this context of increasing complexity and uncertainty, the Union requires a new, more pragmatic approach, and this is where resilience comes in. The resilience paradigm draws on existing EU discourses and practices such as the comprehensive approach or effective multilateralism and brings them together under a unifying logic. This approach has at its core pragmatism and flexibility and requires several elements to make it work: local ownership, capacity-building, partnerships, responsibility and a joint (comprehensive) approach. Let us examine each of these elements in turn.

Firstly, resilience necessitates local ownership. In the area of development and peace-building, it has been argued that the rise of resilience constitutes a way to adapt to the failure of previous international interventions in the 1990s and the 2000s (Chandler 2015b, Joseph 2016). Given the failure of these universalist and externally imposed top-down strategies (Prichard 2013), resilience operates a shift from the international to local (and national) governments, communities and individuals who are the ones that have to learn how to cope with complex risks. In this vein, the EUGS refers to both state and society resilience: “resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society” (EUGS 2016, p. 24). The idea of “local ownership” is certainly nothing new and has become another trope in the discourse of international policy-makers, but it acquires a new meaning under the resilience paradigm as it is not only a moral imperative, but also a pragmatic one. Resilience-building should ensure increased legitimacy and effectiveness of EU external action as it involves those targeted by EU foreign policy (see Wagner and Anholt 2016, p. 4).

This understanding of resilience shares a commitment to promote a “bottom up approach” – or at least to “blend top-down and bottom-up efforts” (EUGS 2016, p. 31) – to foster local agency. As put by the EUGS, “[p]ositive change can only be home-grown, and may take years to materialise” (EUGS 2016, p. 27). Thus, local ownership also requires a long-term commitment on the part of the EU. The EUGS expresses a commitment to work with a variety of local actors: national governments, municipalities and civil society. However, despite the emphasis on local ownership, the target of intervention, the entry point, continues to be the state. As stated in the EU’s Approach to Resilience, it is “primarily the national government’s responsibility to build resilience and to define political, economic, environmental and social priorities accordingly” (Council of the EU 2013, p. 2). This is also evident in other EU documents such as the new Security Sector Reform strategy, which prefers the term “national ownership” rather than local ownership (European Commission and HR/VP 2016). However, the EUGS argues that state and societal resilience are linked insofar that “[s]tates are resilient when societies feel they are becoming better off and have hope in the future” (EUGS 2016, p. 26).

Because of its focus on the local and everyday practices, resilience seeks to move beyond previous institution-building programmes that sought holistic and externally driven changes to building the capacity of local actors from the bottom-up. According to Chandler (2013), resilience represents a turn in state-building discourses and practices from the liberal peace's emphasis on top-down institution-building to a bottom-up approach of building the resilience of individuals, communities and societies. Haldrup and Rosén (2013) argue that while institution-building has not been completely abandoned, the emphasis is now on capacity-building and/or capacity development. According to the EU's approach to resilience, "[t]o reduce humanitarian needs we must put people first, and allow them, especially children, to fulfil their full potential" (Council of the EU 2013, p. 1). Through the lenses of resilience, interventions now should be focused at the level of an actor's capacities rather than on the external or international environment. In the words of the EUGS:

We will work through development, diplomacy, and CSDP, ensuring that our security sector reform efforts enable and enhance our partners' capacities to deliver security within the rule of law. We will cooperate with other international players, coordinating our work on capacity-building with the UN and NATO in particular. (EUGS 2016, p. 26)

The EU's role is to help states and societies build their resilience through knowledge transfers (training, monitoring, mentoring and advising) and financial transfers.¹ Thus, the role of the EU appears now as one of a facilitator, a mentor and a partner moving away from discourses of "external intervention".

The emphasis on capacity-building programmes also suggests that resilience requires strong networks and partnerships at all levels. Partnership remains a key concept in the EU's foreign policy (see previously references to effective multilateralism in the European Security Strategy). These partnerships will be established with states, regional and international organisations. Some of these partnerships will still be strategic partnerships (with core partners, like-minded countries and regional groupings), but the Strategy seeks to "think creatively about deepening tailor-made partnerships further" (EUGS 2016, p. 25). The concept of partnership also extends to civil society and the private sector, as they are thought to be "key players in a networked world" (EUGS 2016, p. 8). While references to partnerships and multilateralism are nothing new at the EU level, the approach now is a more pragmatic one: practice should be the guiding principle when determining who is a strategic partner in what area. According to Grevi (2016, p. 9), "the strategy calls for a pragmatic and flexible posture [...] The issues at stake should determine the adequate format to deliver solutions". Grevi goes on to argue that this approach seems closer to the "more instrumental, result-oriented attitude" of the USA (Grevi 2016, p. 9).

The concept of responsibility also places an important role here. The EU will assume its responsibilities, but "cannot deliver alone" and hence other partners will also need to share this responsibility. This is also in line with resilience's emphasis on the responsabilisation of local governments and communities as discussed above. Having said that, the EUGS does contain a healthy dose of implicit self-criticism, referring to the need for the EU to live up to its values and it claims that the EU should be guided by "a strong sense of responsibility" (EUGS 2016, p. 17). There are many references to the need for consistency and responsibility whether it is about ensuring the resilience of EU democracies, fighting terrorism or transforming the global order. Responsibility is also seen as a *sine qua non* of credibility

and hence of preserving the EU's influence and power around the world, from the enlargement process to advancing a rules-based global order. This responsabilisation, however, also seeks to ensure that the EU remains a committed foreign policy actor in the world in dealing with conflicts and crises. While it is acknowledged that "[t]here is no magic wand to solve crises" and that "there are no neat recipes to impose solutions elsewhere" (EUGS 2016, p. 17), the solution it is argued is "responsible engagement" rather than passivity. It is also about pragmatic engagement, favouring decisive responses in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods, but "targeted engagement" elsewhere, deciding on a case-by-case basis (EUGS 2016, pp. 18, 28). The content of the EU's foreign policy will also vary depending on the geographical area: while in the enlargement countries democratisation will be pursued in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, the further the EU goes, the least this will be a concern. In the ENP, the aim is to foster "closer relations", but the issue of democracy promotion is not mentioned; free markets, however, are a key objective there. In the surrounding areas, again democracy promotion is not mentioned, but the promotion and protection of human rights are and free markets are.

Resilience also requires comprehensiveness and a joint approach. Drawing on the Joint Communication on the Comprehensive Approach (European Commission and HR/VP 2013), the EUGS refers to the need for joint action. A complex and interconnected global world means that events in one part of the world will have an effect in other parts of the world. Rather than seeking to isolate causes, resilience emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach as a way to deal with complex problems. Effective action necessitates coordination between different international and local actors at different levels and between different policies, including a better linkage between internal and external security policies and between EU and Member States policies. This also requires joint assessments and shared strategies for the implementation of these policies (Council of the EU 2013, p. 3, European Commission 2016, p. 2). In other words, "complexity requires abandoning the 'silo mentality'" (Pawlak 2015, p. 1).

Last but not least, resilience requires more flexibility. This constitutes a particular challenge for the EU, given the division of competences between different actors and instruments across the EU's external action. However, the new focus on resilience could facilitate a rethink of how to use existing instruments in a more flexible and practical way to build resilience and the capacities of partners. A case in point is the new initiative on Capacity-Building for Security and Development (CBSD) (European Commission and HR/VP 2015a), which makes use of development funding to finance foreign policy initiatives. The EU's approach on resilience also argues that "different contexts require a differentiated and targeted approach" (Council of the EU 2013, p. 2). Pragmatism also means that there are "different paths to resilience", rather than one single model (EUGS 2016, p. 9). Practice and realities on the ground should be the organising principle, not institutional competencies and/or institutional turf wars. Tailor-made, realistic, pragmatic, locally owned approaches need to be designed and implemented in order to be able to deal with an uncertain environment. As put by Grevi (2016, p. 7),

Flexibility is the common denominator of a double balancing act that runs through the entire strategy. For one, at the political level, the effort to reconcile unity of purpose with the diversity of national outlooks and experiences. For another, at the operational level, the drive to shape comprehensive, joined-up approaches while defining in a timely way targeted, tailor-made policy packages to respond to needs.

In sum, by bringing together all these different dimensions, resilience facilitates the emergence of a more pragmatic EU foreign policy. The introduction of the idea of principled pragmatism would arguably seem to support this conclusion. A closer look, however, reveals some tensions between this pragmatist turn and the liberal model embedded in the EUGS.

Resilience meets “principled pragmatism”

The EUGS introduces the new notion of “principled pragmatism”, alongside an emphasis on resilience-building. According to the EUGS:

We will be guided by clear principles. These stem as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world. Principled pragmatism will guide our external action in the years ahead. (EUGS 2016, p. 8)

At first sight, this seems consistent with the pragmatist turn that has been described above. For one, resilience-building appears to be a self-interested strategy: “It is in the interests of our citizens. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience [...] benefits us and countries in our surrounding regions, sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies” (EUGS 2016, p. 23).² Hence, the EU will be working with both those countries that want closer ties with the EU and those that have no wish to do so, including authoritarian states (EUGS 2016, p. 25). The two key deciding factors when it comes to launching resilience-building programmes would then be “acute fragility” and those countries where the EU “can make a meaningful difference” (EUGS 2016, p. 25). Geopolitics will also play a role in determining where the EU should be more active, with the EU focusing on the neighbourhood (broadly understood), and only engaging elsewhere on a case-by-case basis (see above).

A more pragmatic approach will be thus based on a “realistic assessment” of international politics. In other words, the EU will take into account both the need for cooperation, and the fierce competition it faces on the part of other international powers, in particular, in its neighbourhood. Sven Biscop rightly points out that this would represent a turn to “Realpolitik”. Drawing on Ludwig von Rochau, this is understood not in the traditional sense of the end justifying the means, but as injecting a dose of realism into the achievement of universal values; in other words, “a rejection of liberal utopianism, but not of liberal ideals themselves” or what Biscop (2016) terms “Realpolitik with European characteristics” (pp. 1–2).

In a similar vein, Snyder and Vinjamuri (2012, p. 435) refer to principled pragmatism as “an approach that evaluates the costs and benefits of different strategies on the basis of their ability to deliver or secure a set of designated principles”. This approach, according to the authors, focuses on the conditions that allow for those norms or principles to flourish. In this way, principled pragmatism takes into consideration the “reality” of power and interests by recognising that norms can only be advanced when they are “anchored in a supportive configuration of power and interest” (Snyder and Vinjamuri 2012, p. 438). This also means that we need to consider the consequences of norm-driven actions. Sometimes pragmatic tactics will need to be employed to avoid undesired social outcomes, but with the view of promoting moral principles down the line. According to Snyder and Vinjamuri (2012, p. 442), “[s]ince what we all really care about is improving people’s lives, we need to assess strategies using act consequentialist criteria, not just rule consequentialist standards”.

As argued by Biscop (2016), this turn to pragmatism would explain, for instance, why the EU has now dropped the emphasis on democratisation of the neighbourhood, while calling for a policy of building the resilience of states and societies. “Lowering the level of ambition in terms of democratization is but the acceptance of reality” according to Biscop (2016, p. 2). At first sight, improving the ability of these countries “to reform” would suggest that the EU remains agnostic as to what the objective of the reforms are, leaving those to the recipient states and societies to decide in an effort to apply a bottom-up approach fully in line with the new discourse of “local ownership”. This could also be sold as a technocratic, rather than political, intervention, which would generate less opposition from neighbouring great powers. However, for better or worse, pragmatism remains tied to principles, which introduces key challenges for those seeking a more pragmatic policy.

It is important to note that resilience is not a realist or neo-realist strategy as understood in International Relations theory. There was a conscious effort by the authors of the EUGS not to use the term “stability”, preferring instead that of resilience. In the minds of EU policy-makers, stability was associated with a policy of tacit support for authoritarian powers. Thus, resilience provided “a middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peace-building and under-ambitious stability” (Wagner and Anholt 2016, p. 4). Resilience also appears to be different from other cognate terms such as those of “security” or “defence” (Corry 2014). Resilience does not imply the existence of an “other” we need to protect ourselves from; it is not state-centric even if some of its instruments still focus on capacity-building at the state level and it does not seek to address “external threats”. Its reference point is the building of internal capabilities and capacities in order to better cope with (mainly) non-military and complex risks (Corry 2014). Hence, resilience appears to be a different strategy from that of “security and defence”, which is covered in Section 3.1 “The Security of our Union”. Resilience is not proposed as an alternative to defence, but as a complementary policy. To some extent, we might even argue that defence comes first. As put by the document itself, “[t]he EU Global Strategy starts at home” (EUGS 2016, p. 18). As such, the EU has not done away with the language associated with defence. “External threats” are still mentioned in the text. This is still the preferred term rather than “risks”, which is only used when talking of broader security threats (health, technology, etc.). In other words, the EUGS is still caught between the old (threats, defence, geopolitics and neo-liberal intervention) and the new logics (risks, resilience, complexity and capacity-building). And this is part of the problem when it comes to the use of resilience in the EUGS. The EU has adopted the new concept of resilience and a more pragmatic attitude, but it remains tied to the old scripts. This is particularly the case when it comes to the “principles” side of the equation.

The EUGS is still very much a liberal rather than a post-liberal strategy. Complexity and uncertainty are feared rather than embraced as an opportunity. There remains a belief in universal laws and universal values that the EU should seek to promote through its external action. The promotion of values and interests (which go hand in hand in any case, according to the strategy) constitutes the *raison d'être* of the EU's foreign policy. The EUGS lists these (intertwined) values and interests as follows: peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based international order, which the EU aims to promote both within Europe and in its global abroad.

Resilience is thus wedded to a liberal narrative. Resilience-building – as discussed in Section 3.2 State and Societal Resilience to our East and South – is intentionally seeking change, but this change closely follows a liberal strategy. According to the EUGS, building resilience contributes to sustainable growth and “vibrant societies”. Moreover, it is argued that a “resilient state is a secure state”. Security and democracy are seen as intertwined and therefore, a resilient state also requires a democratic state. So, despite attempts to avoid democratisation, the strategy does link resilience to democracy: “A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state” (EUGS 2016, p. 24). Again, in the context of its enlargement policy, resilience involves “modernisation and democratisation”. Examples of “success” are “prosperous, peaceful and stable democracies” like Georgia and Tunisia. It is true that in the case of authoritarian states, the EU does not explicitly refer to democratisation, but it does still mention the need for “inclusive and accountable governance” and argues that “the EU will therefore promote human rights through dialogue and support, including in the most difficult cases. Through long-term engagement, we will persistently seek to advance human rights protection” (EUGS 2016, pp. 25–26). A liberal approach also applies to the economic sphere. Prosperity requires free markets and access to reliable energy-producing and transit countries (EUGS 2016, p. 22).

For those that might see resilience as a move away from the interventionist policies of the 1990s and the 2000s, there is of course a softening of the discourse, but the liberal peace discourse is still clearly on the table: “We will act globally to address the root causes of conflict and poverty, and to champion the indivisibility and universality of human rights”, with the difference that it now will be done “responsibly”:

In charting the way between the Scylla of isolationism and the Charybdis of rash interventionism, the EU will engage the world manifesting responsibility towards others and sensitivity to contingency. Principled pragmatism will guide our external action in the years ahead. (EUGS 2016, p. 16)

By adding “principled” to its pragmatic turn, the EU has sought to square the circle between the promotion of universal values and doing so on the basis of practical consequences. However, the EU cannot have it both. As argued by Snyder and Vinjamuri (2012, p. 443), “in a world in which consequences matter, resources are limited, and ethical trade-offs are unavoidable, actors who strongly emphasize principles and normative consistency inevitably set themselves up for charges of bad faith”. Unfortunately, principled pragmatism will leave the EU open to the same, if not more, criticisms about inconsistencies and double standards in its external action. Why does the EU privilege stability over democracy in some cases but not in others? How can one promote freedom and human rights without democracy? And what happens when security (stability) trumps freedom or economic equality? For instance, it was clear to many that prior to the Arab Spring, the EU was privileging stability over democracy promotion in its dealings with authoritarian governments in the region. Will the fact that now this will be publicly acknowledged mean that this is then accepted as the right approach? Moreover, the EU also risks undermining the principles it stands for if it contributes to strengthening authoritarian regimes through resilience-building policies. This is, for instance, one of the key debates that have surrounded the adoption of the new initiative on CBSD (European Commission and HR/VP 2015a). What happens when the training and equipment of security forces contribute

to strengthening the hold on power of existing or future authoritarian governments? Finally, by choosing to act in some cases but not in others, the weaknesses and limitations of the EU as an international actor will become even more obvious. This is bound to further undermine its image as a normative/transformational/soft power.

Conclusion: resilience and the EU's international identity

While the rise of resilience and its associated pragmatist turn could be easily rejected as more EU jargon and a rhetorical move, this can have important implications on the EU's identity as a normative power in the medium and long term. There are both positive and negative aspects to this. On the one hand, the rise of resilience can work to strengthen the idea of normative power by underscoring the non-coercive nature of this power. The EUGS still refers to this ideal of normative or transformational power in several places:

Our enduring power of attraction can spur transformation and is not aimed against any country. [...] Many people within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) both to the east and to the south wish to build closer relations with the Union. (EUGS 2016, p. 25)

Resilience can contribute to this by working through persuasion, starting from local practices and local needs, emphasising ownership of the reforms, focusing on partnerships and capacity-building through a “coaching” approach. Moreover, the inherent ambiguity of this concept means that it can be “applied in various contexts, adapted to different institutional visions, and translated into diverse strategies” (Wagner and Anholt 2016, p. 9). This should facilitate cooperation between different actors involved in the formulation and implementation of EU policy. However, lack of clarity as to how the EU should build resilience, what kind of resilience and whose resilience might lead to the recurrent problem of more turf wars in EU foreign policy.

Resilience can also avoid the securitisation of some problems by introducing a long-term logic and “normalising” risk reduction strategies. In other words, dealing with risk becomes a “normal” aspect of our daily lives rather than an exceptional circumstance which requires extraordinary measures, bringing it outside the realm of “normal politics” (something that has been extensively criticised by securitisation theorists). However, even if resilience might not lead to securitisation processes, there is always a risk of depoliticisation. This is because through its focus on capacity-building and mentoring programmes, these initiatives are portrayed as mere technocratic exercises, something that the EU has been long criticised for. Secondly, by putting an emphasis on local actors and micro-processes, we ignore the bigger picture and the power relations in which external actors are implicated (Chandler 2015a). For instance, while the emphasis on capacity-building through knowledge transfers and financial transfers might suggest a less interventionist policy, this does not mean a more egalitarian relationship between the EU and targeted societies. As demonstrated by Merlingen and Ostrauskaite (2005), monitoring, mentoring and advising by EU missions can also be seen as a form of “asymmetric social control” and domination.

On the other hand, references to resilience and principled pragmatism might also serve to undermine the EU's normative power. The EUGS does not problematise the relationship between interests and values as if the promotion of these would always be in sync and harmony. However, as the US National Security Strategy acknowledges, sometimes

“hard choices” will be required (White House 2015, p. ii). Moreover, there remains a tension between an alleged pragmatic and/or realist approach and the endorsement of liberal values. Pragmatism challenges the universality of those values, creates double standards and leaves the EU open to accusations of hypocrisy.

Moreover, the addition of liberal values to the content of resilience-building programmes means that those that have accused EU policies of being another form of neo-liberal governmentality or neo-colonialism will see the EUGS as a continuation of these discourses and practices. While the EU continues to rhetorically support the discourse of local ownership, empowerment and partnership, the content of the programmes will still be expected to conform to “universal” liberal values such as a “rights-based” approach, good governance, democratisation, modernisation, accountability, free markets, etc. This is now combined with a declared responsabilisation of the local partners, but without devolving more power. In sum, while the EUGS tries to square the circle between the idea of resilience and principled pragmatism, it cannot have it both ways.

Notes

1. See also the Communication on Capacity-Building for Security and Development (European Commission and HR/VP 2015a).
2. According to Grevi (2016, p. 3),

the word ‘interests’ recurs 36 times in the former (foreword + full text) and only three times in the [ESS]. It is equally revealing of their different focus, and of the lingering concern with growing popular dissatisfaction with the EU, that the EUGS refers 30 times to EU ‘citizens’ (their interests, security and needs), whereas they were mentioned just three times in the ESS.

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